

351 **Chapter 3: Content of the Foreign Language Curriculum**

352 ***Introduction***

353 A major goal of foreign language instruction in California is to increase
354 students' literacy in languages other than English, thereby also increasing their literacy
355 in English. The concept of literacy includes not only students' ability to read with
356 understanding and to write with clarity and accuracy, but also to understand what they
357 hear and to speak comprehensibly with accurate grammar and pronunciation.
358 Communication is at the heart of second language study whether the communication
359 takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature.
360 In order to communicate successfully in another language, students develop facility
361 with the language, familiarity with the cultures that use these languages, and an
362 awareness of how language and culture interact in societies. They then apply this
363 knowledge as they express ideas in a foreign language. Reaching this goal is central to
364 developing literacy in any language.

365 Learning another language allows students to gain a knowledge and
366 understanding of the cultures that use that language. It can be said that students who
367 master the cultural contexts in which the language occurs truly master the language.
368 Moreover, learning languages provides connections to bodies of knowledge unavailable
369 to monolingual English speakers. Language students develop a greater insight into
370 their own language and culture through comparisons and contrasts with the languages
371 they learn. These elements of language acquisition enable students to participate in
372 multilingual communities both at home and around the world in a variety of contexts
373 and in culturally authentic ways. Students need to be able to use the target language for
374 real communication by speaking, understanding what others are saying, reading, and

interpreting written materials, all in the target language. In enabling students to progress toward the achievement of literacy in a foreign language, teachers provide direct instruction in each of four modes of expression: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

Language Usage

Learning a language is a complex process, whether acquired in infancy as a first language or as a second or third language later in life. In either case, the learning process consists of acquiring a language system rather than learning a series of disconnected components. The language system includes not only grammar rules and vocabulary but also elements such as gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication. It includes discourse, whereby speakers learn “what to say to whom and when.” Knowing a language involves being able to carry out a large variety of tasks in the language learned. It includes knowing which sounds are in the language and which are not, knowing that certain sound sequences make up meaningful words, and being able to combine words to form phrases and phrases to form sentences. It means having a command of the linguistic system—the phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, and semantics—of a language.

The specific elements of the language system to be learned in a foreign language classroom will naturally vary by language. Some languages, for example, will require students to learn entire new alphabets, while other languages will present learners with modifications of a few letters. Some languages will have vastly different sentence structures; others will appear to be more familiar. Familiarity with the language system alone is not enough to enable students to engage in successful

communicative activities. Learners also acquire, through specific and focused instruction, the strategies that assist them in bridging communication gaps that result from differences of language and culture. Examples of these strategies include circumlocution (saying things in different ways), using context clues, understanding, interpreting, and producing gestures effectively, and asking for and providing clarification.

Teachers assist their students in achieving literacy in another language by planning direct instruction based upon appropriate learning strategies. Such learning strategies include: focusing students' attention on learning; teaching them how to organize in advance by previewing, skimming, or reading to glean basic information; aiding students to summarize what they have just learned; and teaching students specific questioning strategies to ask for clarification or explanation. Students are able to apply these strategies in learning tasks in other disciplines in effective ways. In turn, students are able to apply the strategies that work best for them long after they leave the classroom for a lifetime of learning.

Language Structure

Students acquiring a new language learn how the language works. They learn the syntax of the language. Students learn how words are combined into larger units, such as sentences, in order to achieve intended meanings. They learn how to produce strings of words that conform to the syntactic rules of the language, or grammatical sentences. Students learn the correct pronunciation of the written language. They learn that punctuation in other languages can differ from that in English. Students learn, for example, that in Spanish the question mark not only follows a question, but also

precedes the question in an inverted form. They learn the phonology, morphology, and semantics of the language. In short, students learn the grammar of the new language while learning how to communicate.

Students learning a new language learn the sounds patterns, or phonology of a language, and the spellings that represent these sounds. For example, in some languages students learn sounds that do not exist in English. Students of French learn to produce nasalized vowels in words such as *vin*, (wine), *an* (year), and *brun* (brown), and how these sounds are represented in writing. In using language for communication, speakers relate what they produce and hear to the language system to convey meaning. For example, languages such as Chinese are tonal. In acquiring these languages, students learn that the same sounds may have different meanings when produced in a low, mid, or high pitch, or a falling or rising pitch. In some languages, written meaning is transmitted not through an alphabet but through pictographs. Students then learn a writing system that is completely different from English.

In languages that are not tonal, students learn that pitch still plays an important role. For example, in English, one can say “He bought the book.” One can also ask “He bought the book?” Whether the sentence is said as a statement or as a question is dependent upon a rising or falling intonation at the end. In addition, students learn stress patterns that are different from those in English. These relate to individual syllables in multi-syllabic words and to individual words in complete utterances.

Students learning a new language learn the morphology, the rules by which words are formed. They learn how suffixes and prefixes influence the meaning of words. For example, in Turkish, the suffix –ak is added to a verb to make a noun: *bat* means “to sink” while *batak* means a “sinking place” or “marsh/swamp”. Some

languages, such as Bontoc, a language spoken in the Philippines, have infixes, in which a component is added to the middle of the word in order to change its meaning. In other languages, inflectional endings are used to indicate tense.

Students learning a new language learn the semantics, or meaning of words. For example, they learn homonyms—different words pronounced the same but with different meanings. They also learn synonyms—words that have the same or nearly the same meaning, and antonyms—words with opposite meanings. In addition, students learn idioms: fixed phrases with meanings that cannot be inferred by knowing the meanings of the individual words or whose syntax is different from the usual. In addition to learning how words are formed and relate to meaning, students learn how context influences the way sentences are interpreted. For example, in French one can say “Elle est belle.” This can mean “She is pretty,” or it can also mean “It is pretty.” The context in which the sentence is used determines which meaning is appropriate. (In French, *elle* is a feminine pronoun that can refer to an object as well as female person or animal.) Since words are limited in their meanings by context, the range of referents in translating does not always match across language.

Acquisition Of A New Language System

The effective use of language can be viewed as combining individual words in specific ways to make phrases, combining phrases into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs. When an individual implements this process effectively, then the person is thought to be literate in a language. In order to develop this literacy in a foreign language, students possess knowledge about the new language system and are able to use that knowledge for the purpose of communication. What students know and are able to do can be achieved through direct instruction and guided practice orchestrated

by the teacher. In presenting such activities, the teacher considers three essential components: function, topics, and context.

Function:

Function refers to linguistic tasks that students perform, such as asking for and responding to information, narrating past activities, describing events, expressing preferences, and persuading. Function plays a significant role in determining appropriate content. Indeed, it is the foundation upon which lessons and units of instruction are built. The teacher determines the function(s) to be learned as a first step in implementing any lesson or unit of instruction. Next, the teacher decides upon the topics, or subjects, to be learned, along with specific vocabulary and structures that are appropriate for the students' level of maturity, cognition, and language proficiency. Using appropriate instructional materials and other resources, the teacher provides direct instruction that gives students the opportunity to practice the specific language elements to be learned.

Topics:

A variety of topics may be used as the focus of instruction at any given level, except where specific vocabulary or specific structures are beyond the cognitive development of the learners. For example, beginning students of Spanish can practice reflexive verbs in such varied topics as "getting ready for school" or a "a visit to the doctor." At the same time, the topic of "getting ready for school" could be the focus of instruction in intermediate and advanced classes, in which case the language itself would become appropriately more complex. Examples of appropriate topics as students progress

include geography, cultural and historical figures, careers, places, and events. Topics appropriate for language learning in the school setting are of two kinds: social and academic. Social language is language that students use to communicate their interests. Academic language is more formal and relates to the vocabulary and structures students need to succeed in their academic studies. As students advance in attaining proficiency, it is important that topics requiring academic language become used increasingly. While the focus in the beginning level may be more on social language, academic language also needs to be introduced. In intermediate and more advanced levels, the focus is increasingly on academic language, along with a more sophisticated development of social language.

Context:

Context establishes the “where, when, and with whom” language is used. It comprises the settings in which one uses language. Examples of contexts include formal or informal settings. Whether oral or written, language conveys meaning best when the situation and setting in which it is used are known. Context also helps define and clarify the meaning of language that is new to the learner. There are elements of language that are appropriate in some contexts but inappropriate in others. For example, languages such as French and Spanish have more than one form of the pronoun for “you.” In these languages, one form is used to address elders while another is used to address children. In Asian languages, an honorific system designates the use of different forms, depending upon the status of the person being addressed. Knowledge of context assists students not only in comprehending meaning, but also in using language that is culturally appropriate.

519 ***Vocabulary And Concept Development***

520 Vocabulary and concept development is another important component of
521 acquiring a new language system. For infants and young children learning their first
522 language at home, the development of vocabulary and structure occurs as an integral
523 part of the development of concepts. For example, when a young child learns to say
524 “Dada work,” he or she is associating the concept of the father being away from home.
525 By the time children attend school, they have already acquired a rich reservoir of
526 concepts associated with the home language. When these children learn a language
527 other than the home language, the process entails associating the new language with
528 concepts previously acquired. The primary use of language is to convey concepts and
529 meaning. It is, therefore, essential that foreign language teachers provide direct
530 instruction to ensure that students understand the meaning of the vocabulary and the
531 structures they are learning to use. In addition to knowing the denotation of words and
532 phrases, students need to understand the meaning of idiomatic expressions. Direct
533 instruction on the relationship of root words to word families assists in this endeavor.
534 As students become increasingly proficient, they learn the etymology of key words,
535 especially as this information relates to the English language. In this context the study
536 of Latin aids students in developing proficiency in English.

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538 ***Modes Of Expression (Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing)***

539 Four modes of expression, listening, reading, speaking, and writing, constitute
540 the paths by which information and concepts are transmitted from one person to
541 another. Listening and reading are receptive skills, while speaking and writing are
542 productive skills. Teachers need to be sure that students understand new utterances

they hear and read prior to producing those utterances comprehensibly. It is clear that students cannot create the language they are learning; they must first receive input, either from the teacher, recordings, or text material. At each level of proficiency in the language being studied, literate students are able to comprehend what they hear and read. They are able to express themselves comprehensibly through speaking and writing. Proficiency in each of these modes reinforces proficiency in the others. All four modes of expression are important elements of the foreign language curriculum.

In addition, there are three categories that describe language use, based upon the receptive and productive skills: **interactive comprehension and production**, **comprehension alone**, and **production alone**. The first category involves **interactive comprehension and production**. There are many activities in which students communicate with peers or with adults on topics that relate to their lives. This communication can be oral, such as telephone conversations, or in writing, such as correspondence with friends via the computer. These activities provide an exchange of ideas supported by receptive comprehension and comprehensible production. If one party does not understand the interchange, it is relatively simple to achieve understanding through seeking clarification. This category of discourse is a common component of the social use of language.

The second category involves **receptive comprehension only**. Reading a book and viewing a documentary, activities that preclude seeking clarification from the author or narrator, exemplify this category. Here, the reader or listener relies solely upon his or her reservoir of concepts and language decoding skills in order to comprehend. The third category involves **comprehensible production only**. Examples of such activities include completing a job application and delivering a

speech to the student body as part of a school campaign for elective office. In these cases, the writer or speaker makes a presentation that precludes any seeking of clarification of meaning by the reader or listener. This condition places a responsibility on the writer or speaker to use language with clarity and accuracy. This category of discourse is a common component of the academic use of language.

Heritage language learners may bring strong communication skills in the home language to the classroom in the interactive comprehension and production category. Nonetheless, they still need to develop the ability to use the language in the second and third language categories—receptive comprehension and comprehensible production. They may also need to develop skills in using the formal register, so as to be articulate in formal settings. Direct instruction by teachers allows these students to improve existing strengths in the language at more sophisticated levels, and to develop strengths in areas that the home background has already provided support. In addition, heritage language learners acquire literacy skills that contribute to their overall academic experience.

Text Types

Knowledge of text types (a language unit with an intrinsic formal structures, such as words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc.) comprises another important element of acquiring a new language system. The foreign language curriculum's content enables students to progress systematically from simple to complex, and from brief to extensive expressions of language. Specifically, the process of language development includes a progression of three stages. In Stage I, students use and comprehend unanalyzed language samples, such as words, phrases, and some

sentences—both orally and in writing. In Stage II, students break apart and analyze language samples and recombine them to create their own sentences. In addition, ideas may begin to flow across sentences. This stage occurs both orally and in writing. In Stage III, students organize created utterances into paragraphs, thereby expressing more complex meaning. In addition, ideas may begin to flow across paragraphs. This stage occurs both orally and in writing. Language learning proceeds along a continuum on which learners progress at different rates, regardless of course boundaries. It is important for students and teachers to understand this continuum. By being aware of these progressive stages, both students and teachers are able to monitor progress in light of expected outcomes at various stages of language learning. Such awareness also assists instructors in planning direct instruction that continually moves students forward along the continuum.

Accuracy

In order to be considered literate in a foreign language, learners exhibit a high level of accuracy in that language. This includes using the new language with increasing grammatical accuracy and in ways that are contextually and culturally authentic. Accuracy points to the precision of the message in terms of fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sociolinguistic competence. When language practice is contextualized and reflects real-world use, it forms the foundation for developing proficiency. Therefore, all models and examples of language presented to students in class need to be grammatically correct, situationally appropriate, and culturally authentic. This applies not only to language used by the teacher, but also to language in text materials, periodicals, audio recordings, and other language samples

presented in the classroom. In addition, the teacher provides direct instruction that focuses on form and structure, appropriateness to context, and cultural authenticity. The teacher continuously monitors performance in these areas, and provides corrective instruction as necessary.

Text Analysis and Response

Learning to analyze both oral and written texts is an important aspect of becoming literate in a language. While for fluent or native speakers of a language this process occurs automatically, students of the language rely upon the explicit assistance of the instructor. Even during early stages of language learning, senders and recipients of messages need to analyze the denotations and connotations of words and phrases. The depth and extent of this process increase with advanced language proficiency.

Text can be oral or written and can include an article, a poem, or a proverb. Such texts can be presented via the textbook, tapes, or videotape. The teacher helps students to comprehend the main ideas through direct instruction. For example, in a chapter dealing with travel, learners might listen to a public service announcement that gives advice to travelers, read an advertisement on taking a cruise, or listen to a story about a family vacation. Vocabulary and grammar, of course, are appropriate to the topic. In this way, initial authentic contexts contain examples of structures and words used naturally. For example, teaching the chapter on travel outlined above in a Spanish class could incorporate the future tense, the prepositions *por* and *para*, and the subjunctive used with adverbial expressions.

Teachers assist students as they begin to attend to the initial context of text. Beginning with explicit and systematic guidance and instruction, they give students

tasks for demonstrating understanding of main ideas and/or particular details. Such tasks include selecting the main idea from a list of alternatives, creating a different title for the text, responding to true-false questions, and finding specific pieces of information. The teacher can lead the class in discussion for the purpose of relating new information to that learned previously, as well as for increased understanding of the text.

Cultural Information

In addition to experience with the language system, studying another language will provide students with knowledge of the richness of the cultures of the languages being learned. Connections between language and culture can only be understood by those who possess knowledge of both. California's students need to develop an awareness of other people, their unique ways of life, and their contributions to the world. By learning a foreign language, students gain knowledge of social, political, and economic institutions, great figures of history, literature, and fine arts. They also gain knowledge of everyday life in many countries of the world.

The cultural conventions of a country united by the same language are manifested in two distinct ways: 1) a society's production of art, music, and literature and 2) the social conventions of that society's members. These two aspects of culture are appropriate for inclusion in the foreign language curriculum. Teachers present a culture's products as information to their students. For example, there are many topics that enable students to gain information about the culture of the language that they are learning, such as holidays, institutions, and family life. In addition, students may be assigned research projects that provide cultural information, not only from countries

663 outside the United States but also in the ethnic communities here at home. Some
664 students are fortunate enough to have direct access to multilingual communities
665 through their home backgrounds; all students benefit from an awareness of the many
666 communities in California where English and other languages, such as Chinese,
667 Russian, Korean, and Spanish are spoken.

668 The teacher also presents lessons on the society's social conventions. The
669 specific elements of culture to be learned will vary by language, and even within
670 languages, as is the case with the many distinct cultures of speakers of Spanish or
671 French. Due to the strong link between language and culture, it is essential that
672 language be modeled by the teacher and expressed by the students in culturally
673 authentic ways. Examples of language accuracy in appropriate contexts include using
674 the formal or informal forms of speech in a Spanish or French class, and using
675 appropriate gestures, such as bowing, in a Japanese class.

676

677 *Comparisons of Language and Culture*

678 The nature of the language being learned and the culture identified with that
679 language lend themselves to comparison with the English language and American
680 culture. The expected outcome of such comparisons is not only increased knowledge
681 of grammar and proficiency in using the new language, but also increased knowledge
682 and proficiency in English. An objective of the foreign language curriculum is to help
683 students develop an awareness of languages as systems. Direct instruction focusing on
684 the similarities and differences between the language system being learned and English
685 allow students to gain insights about language that contribute to increasing literacy in

686 both English and in the new language. Students benefit from language learning by
687 discovering different patterns among language systems and cultures.

688 By engaging in comparisons between their language and the language learned,
689 learners develop a greater understanding of their own language. By struggling with
690 how to express particular meanings in a foreign language, how to encode them
691 structurally, and how to be sensitive to norms of politeness in another culture, students
692 gain awareness of the nature of language itself. For example, students who assume that
693 all languages are alike may soon discover categories that exist in other languages (e.g.,
694 neuter gender or word endings) that do not exist in their own. This discovery not only
695 enhances students' ability to use the target language, but also provides insights into the
696 strategies their own language uses for communicating meaning.

697 Due to the complexity of the interaction between language and culture, foreign
698 language study provides comparisons between cultures as well as between languages.
699 The study of a foreign language and the resulting intercultural exploration expands
700 learners' view of the world. The long-term experience of studying another language
701 leads students to discover that other cultures view the world differently. When
702 students understand that the target culture assigns new associations to a word, they
703 begin to realize that language is not simply a matter of learning different vocabulary
704 words, but of acquiring a new set of concepts associated with the words. Students may
705 assume that the culture of the language they are learning is the same as that of their
706 own. By providing direct instruction in comparing the culture of the language being
707 learned with that of English speakers, the teacher provides students with the basis for
708 linking language to the appropriate cultural setting. It is important for the teacher to
709 point out that the purpose of comparing cultures is not to decide which culture is better

than the other. Rather, it is to develop understandings that enable the student to develop literacy in the new language as well as in English.

Content and Instructional Relationships

The basic content of foreign language instruction is the language itself—its use in culturally appropriate contexts. However, for every language there is relevant content that can be used to enhance the process of achieving literacy in that language. For example, content in a Spanish course may include information on countries where the language is spoken, the geography of these countries, and the historic events leading to Spanish becoming the language of Latin America. Since it expands access to information, foreign language learning expands the educational experience of all students. This opens doors to learning that enriches the school experience as well as life experience. It also provides learners with skills that last beyond the limits of their formal education. Language acquisition is thus a continuous process that contributes to life-long learning. For example, students may watch news releases from other countries, listen to interviews with foreign nationals before or during the translation, or access vast stores of information from around the globe via connections to the Internet in their homes. The teacher prepares students to gain access to a variety of sources in the other language. These sources include books, magazines, dictionaries, and technological resources.

Foreign language studies build upon the knowledge that students acquire in other subject areas. Students can relate information mastered in other content areas to their learning in the foreign language. The new information and concepts presented in one class become the basis for continued learning in the foreign language classroom.

734 For example, students in the elementary grades may be introduced to science
735 vocabulary related to weather, seasons, and temperatures. At the same time, the
736 foreign language teacher presents the months of the year, seasons, and weather
737 vocabulary in the target language. A comparison of weather conditions in the foreign
738 country with those at home serves to deepen the understanding of previously learned
739 information. Heritage language learners bring additional linguistic and cultural
740 experiences to their classrooms; teachers can build upon this knowledge.

741 Such reinforcement also occurs at higher levels of instruction. For example, the
742 foreign language teacher makes linkages to a history class by introducing students to
743 journalistic accounts of historical events or literary depictions of individuals. Having
744 studied about artists and scientists, students read documentation in various reference
745 materials—descriptions of successes and failures in biographical sketches of various
746 individuals, as well as autobiographical accounts documented in personal letters and
747 diaries of those historical figures. Students learning about the German classical music
748 tradition deepen their understanding of a composer’s works by reading segments of
749 Bach’s correspondence with his contemporaries. Having discussed works of literature
750 in the English class, students have a better understanding of various genres and literary
751 conventions upon encountering similar texts in the language classroom. Foreign
752 language acquisition, then, contributes to the entire educational experience of students
753 by encouraging the transfer, enrichment, and strengthening of concepts acquired in
754 other subject areas.

755

756 ***Conclusion***

757 An important goal of foreign language study is developing literacy in a
758 language in addition to English. Language students need to comprehend both spoken
759 and written language. They need to participate appropriately in face-to-face
760 interactions with members of other societies, and they also need to understand the
761 concepts and ideas expressed by members of these societies through their media and
762 their literature. When students are able to communicate in another language, they are
763 able to convey and receive many different types of messages successfully. These
764 students can use the language to participate in everyday social interactions and to
765 establish relationships with others. They can converse, argue, criticize, request,
766 convince, and explain effectively. In so doing, they take into account the age and
767 familiarity of the individuals with whom they are engaged in conversation. They also
768 use the language to obtain information from written texts and media, taking into
769 account the style, context, and purpose of the communication. It is through combining
770 knowledge of the language system with knowledge of cultural conventions and
771 discourse conventions that California's students will develop literacy in a foreign
772 language.